**Excerpt #1 from**

***Froissart’s Chronicles***

***“The Beginning of the English Peasant Revolt” (1381)***

(written originally in French by writer Jean Froissart in the 14th century)

**While the earl of Cambridge sails to Portugal, and the duke of Lancaster negotiates with the Scots, trouble breaks out in England.**

**Book II, ch. 73.** While these conferences were going forward, there happened in England great commotions among the lower ranks of the people, by which England was near ruined without resource. Never was a country in such jeopardy as was this at that period, and all through the too great comfort of the commonalty. Rebellion was stirred up, as it was formerly done in France by the Jacques Bons-hommes, who did much evil, and sore troubled the kingdom of France. It is marvellous from what a trifle this pestilence raged in England. In order that it may serve as an example to mankind, I will speak of all that was done, from the information I had at the time on the subject.

It is customary in England, as in several other countries, for the nobility to have great privileges over the commonalty, whom they keep in bondage; that is to say, they are bound by law and custom to plough the lands of gentleman, to harvest the grain, to carry it home to the barn, to thrash and winnow it: they are also bound to harvest the hay and carry it home. All these services they are obliged to perform for their lords, and many more in England than in other countries. The prelates and the gentlemen are thus served. In the counties of Kent, Essex, Sussex and Bedford, these services are more oppressive than in all the rest of the kingdom.

The evil-disposed in these districts began to rise, saying, they were too severely oppressed; that at the beginning of the world there were no slaves, and that no one ought to be treated as such, unless he had committed treason against his lord, as Lucifer had done against God: but they had done no such thing, for they were neither angels nor spirits, but men formed after the same likeness with their lords, who treated them as beasts. This they would not longer bear, but had determined to be free, and if they laboured or did any other works for their lords, they would be paid for it.

A crazy priest in the county of Kent, called John Ball, who for his absurd preaching, had been thrice confined in the prison of the archbishop of Canterbury, was greatly instrumental in inflaming them with those ideas. He was accustomed, every Sunday after mass, as the people were coming out of the church, to preach to them in the market places and assemble a crowd around him; to whom he would say, --

"My good friends, things cannot go on well in England, nor ever will until every thing shall be in common; when there shall be neither vassal nor lord, and all distinctions levelled; when the lords shall be no more masters than ourselves. How ill have they used us! and for what reason do they hold us in bondage? Are we not all descended from the same parents, Adam and Eve? and what can they show, or what reasons give, why they should be more the masters than ourselves? except, perhaps, in making us labour and work, for them to spend.

"They are clothed in velvets and rich stuffs, ornamented with ermine and other furs, while we are forced to wear poor cloth. They have wines, spices, and fine bread, when we have only rye and the refuse of the straw; and if we drink, it must be water. They have handsome seats and manors, when we must brave the wind and rain in our labours in the field; but it is from our labour they have wherewith to support their pomp.

"We are called slaves; and if we do not perform our services, we are beaten, and we have not any sovereign to whom we can complain, or who wishes to hear us and do us justice. Let us go to the king, who is young, and remonstrate with him on our servitude, telling him we must have it otherwise, or that we shall find a remedy for it ourselves. If we wait on him in a body, all those who come under the appellation of slaves, or are held in bondage, will follow us, in the hopes of being free. When the king shall see us, we shall obtain a favourable answer, or we must then seek ourselves to amend our condition."

With such words as these did John Ball harangue the people, at his village, every Sunday after mass, for which he was much beloved by them. Some who wished no good declared it was very true, and murmuring to each other, as they were going to the fields, on the road from one village to another, or at their different houses, said, "John Ball preaches such and such things, and he speaks truth."

The archbishop of Canterbury, on being informed of this, had John Ball arrested, and imprisoned for two or three months by way of punishment; but it would have been better if he had been confined during his life, or had been put to death, than to have been suffered thus to act. The archbishop set him at liberty, for he could not for conscience sake have put him to death.

The moment John Ball was out of prison, he returned to his former errors. Numbers in the city of London having heard of his preaching, being envious of the rich men and nobility, began to say among themselves, that the kingdom was too badly governed, and the nobility had seized all the gold and silver coin. These wicked Londoners, therefore, began to assemble and to rebel: they sent to tell those in the adjoining counties, they might come boldly to London, and bring their companions with them, for they would find the town open to them, and the commonalty in the same way of thinking; that they would press the king so much, there should no longer be a slave in England.

World History (HONORS) Name: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

***Reading Guide #1:* Froissart’s Chronicles**

***“The Beginning of the English Peasant Revolt” (1381)***

**Annotate the reading, then answer these questions briefly. Write COMPLETE SENTENCES.**

1. Write down your initial reaction to the reading:
2. What do paragraphs 1 and 2 tell us about the relationship between the nobility and the “commonality”?
3. According to paragraph 3, what is the peasants’ justification for rebellion?
4. Who is John Ball?
5. What argument(s) does John Ball make to the commonality?
6. How does the archbishop react to John Ball’s actions?